

Hightstown, Plainsboro Qualify for Extra State Aid

Wednesday, August 01, 2007

Lisa Coryell

Trenton Times

TRENTON -- Hightstown and Plainsboro were among 80 towns statewide to share nearly \$18 million in property tax relief from the state.

Grants ranging from \$40,000 to \$500,000 were doled out in Extraordinary Aid to towns facing extreme financial difficulties this year.

"Extraordinary Aid reduces the strain property taxes can have on municipalities and provides the support local governments need to invest in their communities," said Charles A. Richman, acting commissioner of the state Department of Community Affairs.

Hightstown and Plainsboro each received \$150,000 in Extraordinary Aid.

Hightstown has asked the state for \$380,000 to help offset flagging revenues in town, said Mayor Bob Patten.

"Our main problems started when the Minute Maid plant closed down several years ago," Patten said. "We haven't been able to recover from that."

Patten said the manufacturing plant had provided about \$235,000 in municipal water revenues each year. The property has since been sold for redevelopment as residential, retail and office space.

"Once that gets going it will be a little gold mine for us," Patten said. "But until we get to that point we need extraordinary aid."

With the funding in place, the municipal tax rate in Hightstown will increase 12 cents to \$1.43 this year. Without the funding, the rate would have increased 19 cents, Patten said.

For a house assessed at the township average of \$118,500, taxes will increase \$142.20 this year. Without the funding, the tax increase would have been \$225.15 for that homeowner.

"If we had gotten \$380,000 it would have brought (the increase) almost down to zero," Patten said.

Plainsboro Mayor Peter Cantu said his town has also suffered flagging revenues over the past few years.

"While our budget has increased nominally from year to year, our revenue losses have had an impact on local taxes," Cantu said. "Every little bit of funding helps."